Until The Cows Come Home

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Until The Cows Come Home

by a_pigeons_soliloquy

Summary

When Will returns home late one night, injured after an encounter with cattle rustlers, Hannibal, his partner and town doctor, must tend to his wounds (even if it means he has to hold him down in the process)

Notes

For FAD Alternate Universes Week, Day 1: Cowboys (even if I'm a few days late oops)

I apologise in advance, I know absolutely nothing about cowboys, this was actually supposed to be art but I decided to try writing a couple of lines to go with it and got a little carried away lol so here we are. just ignore all of the inaccuracies i'm sure are rife in this fic and enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Hannibal is relaxing with his sketchbook and a glass of wine when he hears the familiar sound of hooves trotting up the dusty path leading to his porch.

A warm glow reignites deep within his chest, as it always does when his dear Will returns to him, no longer smothered by the cloak of his love's absence, and as he sets his sketchbook aside and places his half-finished glass on the side table he smiles at the comfort it brings.

It's later than Will typically comes home to him - the evening sun has long since settled behind the hills, and the crickets have begun their nightly chirping - and if he's honest with himself Hannibal had started to feel tendrils of concern creep into the edges of his mind.

Though it isn't necessarily unusual for Will to return home late, the man prone to somewhat losing track of time when focused on his work. He's dedicated, Hannibal knows, and it's one of the many things he admires about Will, but there's danger at night, and while Will can certainly defend himself Hannibal can't help but worry that one day he'll be caught off-guard, or meet a danger he cannot defeat alone. It's not a baseless concern; the ragged scar on Will's shoulder can attest to that, as can the thin white line running down his cheek.

But he also knows that it's not always danger or hard work that keeps Will from him - Hannibal's love has an undeniable habit of collecting strays. Indeed, the last time he'd returned this late it had been with a tiny three-legged puppy, sopping wet and fast asleep, cradled protectively to his chest. Once he'd cleaned and dried the shivering creature, he'd described how he'd found it dumped in a sack in the river, crying out for help with nobody but him around to hear it, and the set of his face and the darkness of his gaze had betrayed the fire burning within. When he'd come home weeks later having seen a man selling puppies of the same breed on his ride through town his eyes had been dark as pitch, and Hannibal's heart had fluttered at the vengeful glint he'd seen within them.

The puppy seller in question had been dead within the year - the victim of an unfortunate accident involving copious volumes of alcohol and a fatal fall in the pigpen. All that had remained of him by the time the farmhand had showed up with the morning feed had been bloodied scraps of clothing and a pile of empty bottles in the corner. Such was the case that nobody had ever had cause to consider that one of his legs might have been taken from the scene, or that he might have in fact been beaten and drowned by avenging hands before his arrival at the barn. It had been a night Hannibal would remember forever, and one that had inspired many drawings in the months that had followed.

Smiling fondly at the memory, Hannibal unlatches the door and steps outside, making to greet his beloved and whatever stray he may be harbouring this time, but the moment he catches sight of Will he knows something is wrong.

Instead of greeting Hannibal with a playful tip of his hat, or that small but genuine smile, Will is slumped over his saddle, head resting heavily against his horse's mane. One of his arms dangles uselessly at his side, while the other clutches at his shoulder, and even from a distance Hannibal can see the deep red seeping through the fabric of his shirt and between his fingers. With his face tucked away, it's hard to check whether his eyes are open, but Hannibal wouldn't have been sure Will was even conscious if not for his continued grip on his injury.

Winston’s reins lie abandoned over his back, the faithful horse seemingly having carried Will all the way home without any guidance. The poor creature is trembling, ears stiff, and his tail swishes rapidly in distress, but he continues up the path until he finally reaches the house, and Hannibal strides quickly over.

“Will!”

A hand to the neck calms Winston’s anxious shuffling, and as Hannibal reaches up to cup Will's face with his other, he notices how tightly closed his beloved’s eyes are and the furrow of his brow. To his relief they flicker open at his touch, but it’s clear how much effort it takes Will to keep them open.

“Hn- Hannibal,” he groans, voice barely a whisper. His breathing is shallow and comes out in pants.

“I’m here, Will. Winston has brought you home to me. You are safe now.”

A faint smile ghosts over Will's lips and his face turns minutely further into Winston's neck. “Such a.. good boy”

Unable to disagree, Hannibal pets one of the horse’s ears, knowing that Will would be doing so if he were able, but also out of a strange desire to thank the animal for bringing his rider home. Winston huffs gently and leans into his hand, and the corner of his lip turns upwards, satisfied that the horse understands.

“That he is,” he says, before pulling back slightly to scan Will for any further injuries. “Are you hurt anywhere else?”

Will grunts. “Just… the shoulder…”

Nodding, Hannibal reaches up, and with some careful manoeuvring guides Will off of the horse into his waiting arms, not caring about the bloodstains that were sure to ruin his linens, and half-supports, half-carries Will into the house.

Laying him gently down on the dining table, Hannibal lets himself fall into the routine ingrained into his muscle memory during his medical apprenticeship, though his touch is more tender with Will than it would be with anyone else.

”What happened?” he asks as his fingers deftly work on unbuttoning Will's shirt.

“Run in… with-” Will yells as Hannibal pulls open his shirt to fully expose the wound. Hannibal strokes a thumb across his collarbone until he regains his breath. “-Rustlers. Tried to… steal… Daisy. Managed to… run them off, but… not before they got me”

Ah, Daisy, no wonder, Hannibal thinks wryly. One of Will's favourite members of the herds; any attempt to bring her harm would certainly have brought down Will's wrath on the perpetrator, even more so than it would have otherwise. At least, he thought, he could be certain that the perpetrators hadn’t gotten off lightly.

With not so innocent images of Will's beautiful vengeance floating around his head, he forces himself to focus on the matter at hand and inspects the wound. Surrounded by ragged edges, it's still sluggishly pulsing blood, and he can just about see the glint of the bullet still buried within the flesh. Though many doctors simply leave the bullets in their patients' wounds, Hannibal detests the thought of an implement from any hands but his own being permanently sealed into his beloved's body, and he receives only a resigned sigh in response when he informs Will as such.

"I.. thought you might… say that," he groans. 'Doesn't make it… any easier to… hear, though."

His nose scrunches up in a grimace, and Hannibal pets his hair with sympathy that is only partly a facade, then rises to his feet. "I'll bring you your whiskey."

Soon Will is attempting to replace the majority of his blood volume with alcohol as Hannibal prepares his supplies. They've done this once before, so they both know the drill, but Will is right that it won't be pleasant. Or at least it won't be for him. For Hannibal it will be a far more enthralling experience; an opportunity to reach inside Will's flesh and stitch it back together; the ability to draw noises from Will and know that it is his hands that are causing them; the knowledge that every inch of trust and every small flinch or pained cry Will gifts to him is intended for him and him alone, and is nobody else's to know.

He won't prolong Will's suffering any longer than necessary for his own enjoyment, however. Not without Will's consent, at least. And Hannibal has a feeling that he isn't in the mood for any more suffering than he is already going to have to endure tonight.

When he returns with gauze, a bowl of water and newly sterilised instruments, Will has positioned himself a little more comfortably on the table and has made his way through over half of his bottle of whiskey. The alcohol seems to have roused him a little, though if it does its intended job the effect won't last much longer.

"It's times like these I… wish I didn't have such a high tolerance… for alcohol," Will laments between breaths, after taking a particularly large swig. "Sure would… make this… a whole lot more effective."

Hannibal places the tray of instruments on the table and starts arranging them as he prefers. "Some ancient civilisations believed that pain purifies the soul," he offers.

Will just snorts, then winces at the new wave of pain the movement sends jolting through his shoulder. "Ain't a whole lot… of purifying that can… be done at this point," he says wryly. "For either of us, 'specially you."

Hannibal hums. "And how would you define this purity that we, according to you, both lack?"

Will seems to roll the question around his brain much like his tongue rolled the whiskey around his mouth. "Well… I'm not entirely sure I ever… really knew what purity truly is, but I think… not committing murder might have… a little to do with it," he eventually drawls between shallow breaths, smirk playing on his lips.

With an amused tilt of his head, Hannibal concedes, choosing not to debate Will further in favour of reaching for his tweezers. Noticing this, another grimace passes over Will's face, more dramatic this time. “Aww, hell,” he mutters to himself.

Hannibal looks at him, sees the way he'a begun to fidget, and raises an eyebrow. “Will I need to tie you down?”

Eyes narrowing, a suggestive grin spreads across Will’s lips, warring with his apprehension. “Why, do you want to?”

“My darling Will,” Hannibal says, and leans down to press a kiss to Will’s mouth. He smells like whiskey, and when Hannibal licks his lips he can taste the faintest hint of alcohol. Lips still brushing Will's, he murmurs. “You know I will always love to see you restrained.”

Eyes widening slightly, Will's pupils dilate even further, and Hannibal knows with deep satisfaction that it's not only from the alcohol. Their breaths mingle for a long moment before Will looks away, shaking his head. “Well you’re outta luck, nothing to tie me down to. Besides, I've done this before, I can handle it.”

But Hannibal isn’t deterred. “All the same, I would prefer to be sure that I won’t cause unnecessary damage to your shoulder if my hand is jolted.”

“Oh?” Will hums, intrigued despite it all. “Then what are you suggesting, doctor?”

Without further explanation, Hannibal climbs carefully up onto the table and situates himself atop Will's chest, moving his knee so that it pins Will's uninjured arm to his side. “I am suggesting,” he says, enjoying Will’s wide-eyed expression, “that I use my weight to keep you still while I work.”

Pupils fully blown, Will visibly swallows. Licks his lips. Nods. “I think I’d be amenable.”

With an expression like a cat that got the cream, Hannibal inclines his head. “Very well.”

He offers Will a strip of thick fabric to hold between his teeth before reaching for his tools once again and settling firmly on Will's body. The fine tremors vibrating from the form beneath him send tingles through his thighs, and Hannibal suspects the adrenaline coursing through Will’s veins isn’t solely due to fear. He raises a pair of tweezers and raises an eyebrow.

“Then shall we begin?”

The first brush of the tweezers against the burning flesh of Will’s shoulder wound make him flinch just slightly, and Hannibal's knees tighten just so around Will's upper body. It is as much a comfort as it is a warning, and Hannibal is pleased when he feels Will take a few deep breaths to get used to the feeling.

The second touch is deeper, and firmer, and Will whines, jaw clenching tightly around the gag and neck muscles straining. As Hannibal quickly but carefully guides the tool slowly through layers of shredded muscle and sinew and fat, a scream forces its way from Will’s

throat, his body jolting without his permission. Hannibal simply clenches his thighs even tighter to minimise the movement, just for one moment longer, and then he feels the bullet between the two metal prongs.

“You’re doing very well, Will.” he says. “Just one pull and the bullet will be out.”

Will only pants beneath him, eyes screwed tight and breaths hitching slightly. Then his damp eyelashes flicker and he’s met with Will’s lidded gaze, hazy with suffering and whiskey yet still bright with pain and glistening wet. Their eyes meet, and for a long moment they stay still, unspoken sentiments travelling between them. Then Will’s head lolls to the side, an implicit permission to continue, and in one swift, steady movement Hannibal brings the metal up and out of Will’s shoulder until it glistens, dripping with blood, in the candlelight.

With a clink, he drops it into the waiting bowl and retrieves the remaining bottle of spirit from the counter. Gently, he reaches down to caress Will’s cheek gently, fingers tangling in his curls when the man weakly leans into his touch. “I now must clean and stitch the wound,” he murmurs, “and then it will be over.’

Even through the gag, the sound Will makes when the alcohol touches his wound is ungodly, and Hannibal has to press all of his weight onto his body to keep him in place. Quickly, though, the thrashing becomes weak, then merely barely-visible muscle contractions. Hannibal looks down to see that Will has almost lost his fight with consciousness, now lying limp beneath him, barely lucid.

Hannibal’s lip curls fondly, and he soaks up the mix of blood and spirit from the wound before gathering his needle and stitches and beginning work on sewing Will’s shoulder back up.

When the surgery is finished, and Will is all cleaned up, Hannibal applies gauze to the wound and wraps bandages around his shoulder and torso. To pass the material around the man’s chest with ease, he carefully gathers Will up and brings him to lie against his chest. With his beloved cradled so defenselessly against him, Hannibal can’t resist burying his nose in the damp curls and inhaling the stench of sweat and adrenaline and cattle and something so indescribably *Will* that he always carries with him after a day of work. Warm breath puffs against his neck, and for what is far from the first time (and certainly isn’t the last), Hannibal is overcome by how much he adores Will.

He holds him for a long while, committing the feeling of Will in his arms to memory, then places him carefully back down on the table, climbs down from atop it and gathers him back up, carrying him over to their waiting bed.

Later, once Will has awoken, Hannibal will collect a warm bowl of water and wash the sweat from his body and hair, but for now he’s content to simply wrap him up in a blanket and watch over him as he sleeps. When he’s satisfied that Will is comfortable, he checks on Winston, who still waits patiently outside, then sets to making a broth for Will to eat when he wakes up. As he leaves it to stew, he retrieves his sketchbook from where it has remained on the side table and opens it to a new page. What materialises on the paper is an image of Will where he lies on the bed, curls flattened by sweat and the confines of the wide-brimmed hat he’s worn all day, blanket draped artfully to resemble the togas of the ancient sculptures and

paintings he saw displayed in galleries in his youth. No matter Hannibal's talents, the drawings don't quite capture Will's full beauty, but it's good enough, he thinks, for now. He has the real thing right beside him.

By the time Will rouses for dinner, the sketchbook has gained many new depictions of Will from the evening, and Hannibal's fingers are blackened from the charcoal.

"Those all of me?" Will croaks when he sees Hannibal place the book down to come to him. His face is lined with pain, but it doesn't look as severe now that the wound has been bandaged. He seems to be able to tolerate it, at least, which is the best they can really hope for at this point in Will's recovery.

"Of course," Hannibal says, "You are, after all, my favourite subject."

Will just shakes his head, as much as he's able. "I'm surprised you haven't got bored of drawing me yet."

Oh, foolish boy.

Hannibal fixes him with a look, exasperated yet so, so very enamoured.

"If all I ever draw for the rest of my days is you, Will, it will still never be enough."

If it had been the early days of their courtship, Will's face would have reddened significantly at such words, but now he just sighs. It is fond, though, terribly so, and it fills Hannibal with warmth to know that he can still please Will like this, even after all this time.

A moment passes in which they simply gaze at each other, and then, in a conspicuous manner that suggests he's had his fill of emotions for now, Will makes a show of inhaling deeply. "Is that soup?" he asks, and Hannibal nods, allowing Will his escape this time. "It'd better not be whatever you fed me last time, that was awful."

Hannibal huffs a small laugh. "No, I supposed that after last time I would have to pin you down all over again to force you to drink it, and I'd rather not risk you tearing your stitches over a little soup." He looks down at Will appraisingly. "How are you feeling?"

"Feel like crap, doctor, I can't lie to you," Will says, tiny smirk on his lips, "but I'm starving. Serve up?"

And so they eat.

Despite Hannibal's attempts to persuade him otherwise, Will insists on feeding himself, resulting in the injured man sitting between Hannibal's legs in bed, leaning back against Hannibal's broad chest for support. It's comfortable, peaceful, despite the way Will's curls tickle Hannibal's skin, or his occasional curse when he jostles his injured shoulder, and soon Hannibal can't resist pressing slow kisses to the back of his head. When his lips eventually brush Will's cheekbones the man sighs and leans into the touch, and when he moves down to Will's neck the man tilts his head, tiny sounds escaping his mouth with every kiss.

For what must be the hundredth time that night, Hannibal is struck once more by the wonderful, all-consuming adoration he feels for the man in his arms who is, without a doubt in his mind, his soulmate in all ways possible, and with every little noise Will makes the feeling just grows stronger and stronger. He holds Will reverently in his arms, in awe of the warmth of his body that means he's beautifully, beautifully *alive*, and breathes. And breathes. Their chests expand in tandem.

It feels like worship.

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed it and thank you for reading my silly little barely cowboy-related fic haha :) honestly it was just an excuse to hurt will and write some homoerotic wound-tending and fluff and I had fun writing it

let me know what you thought! and have a great rest of your day :D

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